

Louise M. Slaughter

1929–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE

DEMOCRAT FROM NEW YORK

1987–



Congressional Pictorial Directory
109th Congress

LOUISE SLAUGHTER, COMPLETING HER 10TH TERM as a U.S.

Representative from western New York, serves as the Ranking Member on the House Rules Committee, the first woman to serve in this position. Slaughter, a microbiologist by training, is an expert on health and women's issues. "I have always said that the best training in the world for government is to be a woman, to be a mother," Slaughter once noted. "We learn that our budget has to stretch to the next paycheck. . . that every member of our family has to have food and clothing and an education."¹

Louise McIntosh was born in Harlan County, Kentucky, on August 14, 1929. McIntosh earned a B.S. in microbiology from the University of Kentucky in 1951 and, two years later, an M.S. in public health. After graduation, she married Robert Slaughter. The couple eventually moved to Rochester, New York, and raised three daughters. Slaughter's political activism began in 1971 when she campaigned to save Hart's Woods in Rochester.² Although she was unsuccessful, the experience moved Slaughter toward a career in public service. She served as co-chair of the Monroe County Citizens for McGovern in 1972, joined the New York State Democratic Committee and, in 1976, was elected to the first of two terms in the Monroe County legislature. She later worked for Mario Cuomo, then-New York secretary of state. In 1982, Slaughter defeated a Republican incumbent to win a seat in the New York assembly, where she served until 1986.

Slaughter sought election to the U.S. House in 1986, running a grass-roots campaign to unseat conservative first-term incumbent Fred Eckert. She defeated Eckert with 51 percent of the vote. For a decade thereafter, Slaughter won re-election by comfortable but not large margins around Rochester, which had traditionally voted for moderate Republicans. In the late 1990s, she won by larger margins and, after reapportionment placed her in a newly redrawn district, which included much of her old district in the Rochester area, as well as new sections in Buffalo and Niagara Falls, she won by 25 points. In 2004, Slaughter was re-elected to her 10th consecutive term, with 72 percent of the vote.³

As the second-longest serving woman Democrat in the House, Representative Slaughter has worked on a half-dozen committees during her career, among them: Government Operations (later named Government Reform), Public Works and Transportation (later named Transportation and Infrastructure), Budget, the Select Committee on Aging, and the Select Committee on Homeland Security. She now serves on the powerful Rules Committee that oversees which legislation is debated on the House Floor. Appointed in 1989 to fill a vacancy on the committee caused by the death of Florida's Claude Pepper, Slaughter is the top-ranking Democrat on that panel. On the Rules Committee, she is a vocal proponent of women's reproductive rights and health.

During the early 1990s, she was responsible for securing the first \$500 million dedicated by Congress to breast cancer research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH).⁴ She was a leader in efforts to force the NIH to start including women in all clinical trials. She sponsored the first law directing the NIH to research the miscarriage drug diethylstilbestrol (DES), which had serious health consequences for some children exposed in utero. Slaughter also has authored legislation to improve research on women's environmental health, educate Americans about colorectal cancer, and reduce waste, fraud and abuse in the Medicare program.

Slaughter is acknowledged as the leading expert in Congress on genetic discrimination issues. For 10 years, Slaughter has introduced legislation to prohibit employers and insurers from discriminating against individuals based on genetic factors. This legislation has garnered more than 220 bipartisan cosponsors in the House and endorsements from dozens of health-related organizations. This bill has passed unanimously in the Senate twice.

Slaughter, who co-chaired the Congressional Women's Caucus in the 108th Congress (2003–2005), has been a leader on women's issues, ranging from family planning to reducing domestic violence. Slaughter was one of seven Congresswomen who marched on the Senate Democratic Caucus in 1991 to protest the Senate Judiciary Committee's treatment of Anita Hill during the Clarence Thomas Supreme Court confirmation hearings. She was an original author of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in 1994, and she has been a cosponsor of subsequent VAWA reauthorization bills, including VAWA III which became law in 2006. She also has led the efforts to enhance the Pentagon's response to sexual assault against women serving in the U.S. armed forces.

Deeply concerned about the economic welfare of her district, Slaughter has steered millions of dollars into local building and transportation projects and has commissioned studies on the decline in local manufacturing jobs.

FOR FURTHER READING

Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, "Louise McIntosh Slaughter," <http://bioguide.congress.gov>

NOTES

1 Debbie Howlett, "For Some, A Great Notion: Parity-50% Female Congress Envisioned," 1 April 1992, *USA Today*: 5A.

2 *Politics in America*, 2004 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2003): 737.

3 "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," <http://clerk.house.gov/members/electionInfo/elections.html>.

4 "Official Biography of Louise Slaughter," <http://www.slaughter.house.gov> (accessed 17 November 2004).